

# STAFFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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August 26,2005

To: Jean S. Murray, Ed.D. Superintendent  
Andrea L. Bengier, Ed.D. Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Technology

From: Cynthia Holder, Principal, Brooke Point High School  
Thomas Nichols, Principal, North Stafford High School  
James Stemple, Ed.D. Principal, Mountain View High School  
Patricia Wiedel, Ph.D. Supervisor of Professional Development

Re: Block Scheduling Professional Development Plan

Attached please find the plan we developed to address the training needs of our school communities to ensure a successful transition to block scheduling. The three goals of our plan for the 2005-06 school year are:

- Understanding block scheduling and the use of time;
- Effective lesson design and active learning strategies for the block; and,
- Updating curriculum maps and instructional pacing guides.

We appreciate your support of our move toward implementing the block schedule at our schools and look forward to providing you with ongoing information as we progress.

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## **Executive Summary - Stafford County High Schools Moving to Block (Brooke Point, Mountain View, North Stafford)**

### **Time and Scheduling**

For the past few years, all Stafford County schools have focused on continuous school improvement. Each school has a school improvement plan, addressing challenges in teaching and learning and targeting resources to address identified priorities. While the high schools looked at many areas to improve upon, the area of scheduling has gone relatively unnoticed.

Scheduling is a valuable but untapped resource for school improvement. Scheduling allows schools to use time differently. Time has long been considered a restraint on learning and has been referred to as “learning’s warden” (Prisoners of Time, 1994). A well-crafted schedule that looks at time can:

- result in more effective use of time, space, and resources (human as well as material);
- improve instructional climate;
- help solve problems related to the delivery of instruction; and
- assist in establishing desired programs and instructional practices (Canady and Rettig, 1995).

### **Block in Stafford County**

With these thoughts of scheduling and time in mind, a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators in Stafford County began looking at alternative scheduling in 1995. A committee report prepared by Tom Skinner, Becky Danello, and Vickie Inge, suggested that a modified semester block be incorporated in the high schools (three at that time). This modified block would consist of the 4 x 4 plan with singleton courses running year long.

The committee also suggested that the principals at each of the high schools survey their students, parents, and staff about their knowledge of and/or desire to pursue alternative scheduling at their own school sites. These surveys were completed and at that time it was determined that not enough support from teachers was evident; thus the recommendations went no further.

In the spring of 2003 the staff at North Stafford began work-out groups to discuss block scheduling once again. At that time many issues were brought up to then principal Jim Stemple,

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who began looking at block in-depth. Site visits were made to Gar-Field High School in Prince William, Edison High School in Fairfax, Hanover High School in Hanover, and Blake High School in Montgomery County, MD. In November, a presentation was made to the Stafford County School Board, and in November, 2004, the Stafford County School Board approved the use of block scheduling for Mountain View High School.

In December 2004, Cindy Holder, Principal of Brooke Point High School requested approval for block scheduling. In January 2005, permission was granted for Brooke Point to use an alternative schedule and guidelines were established for other schools who may wish to transition to alternative scheduling. In the spring of 2005, North Stafford decided to pursue block scheduling. The school board at the January 2005 meeting did request that all schools utilize the same alternative schedule.

## **Hybrid Model**

Teams of teachers, counselors, and administrators from the two existing high schools visited several schools currently on the alternative schedule to determine which alternative schedule would be used. Through the visits and committee meetings it was determined that the hybrid model would be used. This model incorporates the best features of the 4 x 4 or college plan model with the alternating day model.

The reasons this model was adopted were numerous. First, it allows a student who needs more time to learn the opportunity to have more time. In a traditional seven-period day schedule a student has no opportunity to have more time unless he or she stays after school or attends a summer school program. With the block, this same student has the opportunity to take two like classes the same year (take a math class the first semester and a second math class the second semester). In contrast, a student on a traditional schedule would have to take two like classes simultaneously, leaving a high probability of failing two courses.

The second advantage of an alternate schedule is for a student who may like to accelerate and learn at a faster pace. Students who excel in a given subject may have the opportunity to take more classes in that area. A student would have the opportunity to become multi-lingual in languages, which is very difficult to do in a traditional seven-period day. Also, a student may take more of the classes for the Early Scholars program or even graduate early if he or she desires.

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Gaining eight credits a year was a third advantage for our hybrid-schedule. A student now has the opportunity to take eight credits (32 in four years) as opposed to 28 credits under the traditional day. These extra credits open up a myriad of opportunities for students.

A fourth advantage for the hybrid-model was the use of the alternating day for advanced placement and performing arts courses. By incorporating these courses into the hybrid plan as alternating day courses, students are able to keep their performing arts classes and not use two of their credits per year on performing arts class.

## What a Schedule Will Look Like

Below are three actual student schedules from Mountain View High School.

### **Student A** (straight 4 x 4 schedule)

#### First Semester

First Block – Biology

Second Block – Design/MM

Third Block – Algebra 1

Fourth Block – English 10

#### Second Semester

First Block – Spanish 2

Second Block - CIS

Third Block – Health/PE 10

Fourth Block – W/His. 10

### **Student B** (one year-long course during third block)

#### First Semester

First Block – US/VA History

Second Block – Sports Marketing

Third Block – Auto Tech. II

Fourth Block – Finance

#### Second Semester

First Block – Physical Science

Second Block – English 11

Third Block – Auto Tech II

Fourth Block – Geometry w/ Apps.

### **Student C** (two alternating day courses during second block)

#### First Semester

First Block – Biology

Second Block – English 11 Hon/AP American History

Third Block – Spanish III

Fourth Block – W. History 10

#### Second Semester

First Block – Physics

Third Block – Adv. Programming

Fourth Block – Math Anl./Trig

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## **Professional Development**

Simply changing the bell schedule offers no guarantee of increased student achievement. A schedule is merely a tool used in education to manipulate the time variable, one of several key factors in student learning. A second variable, the student variable, is addressed in other areas of the school improvement plan. A third variable is addressed in the following pages of this summary in the form of the block training plan for the three high schools. The implementation plan for block scheduling is developed around three goals:

- Understanding block scheduling and the use of time;
- Effective lesson design and active learning strategies for the block; and,
- Updating curriculum maps and instructional pacing guides.

Modifying the time variable alone will not necessarily translate into greater student learning. What teachers do with the extra time is the critical factor. The following plan outlines how we intend to help teachers understand concepts behind block scheduling and effectively utilize time to increase student achievement..

## **Monitoring the Plan**

The three principals involved in block scheduling have met regularly since November, 2004 with members of Central Office to plan and discuss the implementation of the alternative schedule. These meetings will continue throughout the school year. Toward the close of the first semester, a status report will be prepared to summarize each school's progress in implementing the block schedule. Data for this report will be grounded in minutes from teachers' department meetings, classroom observations, and summaries of focus group meetings held with parents, students, and teachers. Recommendations for further professional development and/or other school changes will be included in this update.

## **Initial Evaluation of Block Scheduling**

While educational research suggests a five to seven year period for the successful implementation of any major change, we acknowledge the need for ongoing evaluation and mid-course corrections. Thus, a preliminary evaluation on the block scheduling initiative will be undertaken at the close of the 2005-06 school year. Information from this evaluation will inform principals and their staffs on the level and type of support needed to increase the effectiveness of the learning experience for students.

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## *Professional Development Plan for Block Scheduling*

**Goal:** Teachers will develop and understanding of block scheduling and its affects on teaching and learning.

**Rationale for this goal:** Teachers must learn how the time gained in alternative schedules can benefit teaching and learning.

Action steps/processes	Person responsible	Budget	Target date for completion	Evaluation
Site visits by teams of teachers, administrators, and counselors to schools utilizing the block in Prince William, Fairfax, Hanover and Montgomery (MD) Counties.	Jim Stemple - MV Doug Shuch - BP Tom Nichols - NS	Travel expenses	Fall 2004 through Spring 2005	Notes Conversations Reports to faculty
Committees of teachers, counselors, and administrators met at BP and NS to research, discuss and begin implementation of block scheduling.	Cindy Holder - BP Tom Nichols - NS	None	Spring 2005	Reports to faculty
Luke Fennel, former principal at Edison HS met with a committee of teachers at North Stafford HS to discuss the block scheduling concepts.	Tom Nichols	Luke Fennel	Jan., 2005 Feb., 2005	Committee feedback

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## *Professional Development Plan for Block Scheduling*

Goal: Understanding Block Continued - Page 2

Action steps/processes	Person responsible	Budget	Target date for completion	Evaluation
Louis Mangione led a Saturday workshop for teachers, counselors and administrators on implementing a block schedule and the benefit of an alternative schedule.	Tom Nichols	\$1500 + expenses	April, 2005	Session evaluation
During block training in July Lynn Canady spoke to the teachers on the benefits of block scheduling and understanding of how time benefits learning.	Jim Stemple - MV Cindy Holder - BP Tom Nichols - NS	Cost for 3-day workshop + food approx. \$15,000	July 25th, 2005	Session evaluation
For those unable to attend the July block training institute, a second set of sessions will be held during the teacher workweek. Presenters include Lynn Canady, Roger Mackey and Harold Wright.	Cindy Holder	\$4000	August 29 and 31, 2005	Session evaluation

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## *Professional Development Plan for Block Scheduling*

Goal: Understanding Block Con'td - Page 3

Action steps/processes	Person responsible	Budget	Target date for completion	Evaluation
Teachers at individual schools will continue to meet as departments and schools to evaluate their understanding of block.	Department Chairs	None	On-going on a monthly basis	Meeting minutes
Parent meetings were held at each high school to explain the block scheduling format and its benefits.	Principals	None	Spring, 2005	Discussion Q & A
Letters were sent to households explaining block scheduling.	BPHS staff NSHS staff	Postage	Jan. , 2005 Feb., 2005	Feedback through individual meetings with parents and phone calls.
Counselors will discuss block scheduling with new parents at time of registration.	BPHS Staff NSHS Staff MVHS Staff	None	Summer and Fall, 2005	Parent feedback Counselor documentation
An explanatory letter will accompany all schedules sent to students/parents at the start of the 2005-06 school year.	NSHS Staff BPHS Staff	Postage	August, 2005	Parent phone calls



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## *Professional Development Plan for Block Scheduling*

**Goal:** Incorporating effective strategies for Block Scheduling into Lesson Design

**Rationale for this goal:** Implementation of Block Scheduling for the 2005-06 school year

Action steps/processes	Person responsible	Budget	Target date for completion	Evaluation
Provide lesson design strategies for Block Scheduling July 25-27, 2005 through consultants John Strebe, Jane Butler, and Lynn Canady	Arranged and hosted by J.Stemple, C.Holder and T.Nichols	3-day institute = \$15,000	July 25-27, 2005	Session evaluation
Provide make-up session on Lesson Design Strategies August 29 – 1:30 – 4:00 August 31 - 8:30 – 3:30 with consultants Harold Wright, Roger Mackey, Curriculum Coordinators/Supervisors and teacher facilitators.	J. Stemple C. Holder T. Nichols	\$3000 + expenses	August 29 & August 31	Session evaluation
Semimonthly department meetings to share effective lessons utilizing best practices in instructional design for working in the block.	Principal Department Chairs Lead Teachers Asst. Principals	Cost to duplicate materials	Bi-monthly to be completed by June 12	Each department member will share successful “block” lessons that have been implemented – a copy of each will be submitted with the minutes.
Administrative observations/walk throughs to determine effective block lesson implementation.	Principal Assistant Principals	Cost to duplicate materials (see attached)	May, 2006	All new teachers and teachers on the Accountability Evaluation Model to receive required formal observations. Every teacher to receive a minimum of (2) structured observations with feedback.
Peer observations for any teacher who is having a difficult time designing an effective block lesson in their content area.	Principal Assistant Principals	Professional leave if necessary	March, 2006	Formal observation by administrator of successful implementation of a well designed block lesson
Ongoing professional development through participation in conferences, workshops and ongoing PDSs led by lead teachers/department chairs.	Principals Lead Teachers Department Chairs TRT's	Registration /travel fees	Ongoing	Session evaluations

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## *Professional Development Plan for Block Scheduling*

**Goal:** Redesign Pacing Guides and update Curriculum Maps for Block Scheduling

**Rationale for this goal:** Implementation of Block Scheduling for the 2005-2006 school year.

Action steps/processes	Person responsible	Budget	Target date for completion	Evaluation
Provide an opportunity for teachers to meet, discuss, and update/redesign curriculum maps and pacing guides to reflect block schedule and new textbook adoptions.	Arranged and hosted by Stemple Holder Nichols	Cost of: N/A Utilized SCPS Instructional Coordinators	July 27, 2005 and Aug 29,& 31, 2005	Minutes and revised documents
Provide subject area specific SOL data from Tracker to update/redesign curriculum maps and pacing guides.	Building level administrative teams, testing coordinator, and TRT.	SOL Data from Tracker	August 2005	Updated/redesigned curriculum maps and pacing guides.
Establish content specific Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in each Department and provide opportunities to meet in PLC's.	Building level administration: Principal Assistant Principals Dept. Chairs/Lead Teachers	2 (.5 days) of release time	2005-06 school year	PLC meeting minutes
Provide teachers the opportunity to meet twice a month to discuss and make corrections curriculum maps and pacing guides	Principal Assistant Principal Department Chairs/Lead Teachers	Cost of: Reproduction of materials	Twice a month to be completed by June 12	Completed curriculum maps and pacing guides with suggestions and revisions for the following term. Each department will submit minutes and a copy of the revised curriculum map and pacing guide.
The Administration will conduct observations to ensure that curriculum maps and pacing guides are used for the planning of instruction and are appropriate.	Principal Assistant Principals	Cost of: Evaluation and observation forms	On-going for the school year	All new teachers and teachers on the accountability Evaluation Model to receive required observations. Every teacher to receive a minimum of two walk-throughs.
Increase the role of the department chair/lead teachers to conduct walk-throughs to monitor implementation of curriculum maps, pacing guides, textbooks, and supplemental materials.	Principal Assistant Principals Department Chairs/Lead Teachers	Professional leave as necessary	On-going for the school year	Feedback loops (reports to departments/leadership team/faculty/administrators)

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